

Local Community Assessment of St Peter's Mission Field

St. Peter's United Methodist Church
Seattle District
Pastor: Thomas G. Steffen
Completion Date: December 14, 2009

We consider understanding the composition of the local community, or "mission field" as the PNWC identifies it, to be a logical starting place for thinking about how we can best serve it and what the church's long- and short-range plans should be.

The Process

St Peter's is using a multi-step process to learn more about ourselves and our community and develop long-and short-range plans.

After informal conversations between the pastor and several church leaders, we began our formal study process by creating a strategic planning team that includes the pastor and a diverse group of 10 individuals including some who are charter members of the church and others who have recently affiliated with St. Peter's.

After several planning meetings with the team leaders, an initial session occurred on November 23rd. During that meeting the Pastor provided a charge to the group and team members agreed to complete the self-assessment tool provided us.

On December 7th the pastor and team leaders met with representatives from various local faith communities, governmental agencies, and private enterprises who have been invited to share information about the demographics and human needs of our mission field. From this meeting we acquired data from the Bellevue School District and St. Louise Roman Catholic Church. The Bellevue city demographer shared a special report concerning characteristics of the area. A copy of her report is included with this document. Between now and mid-January we will seek additional information from these sources and prepare and share a profile with other organizations as well as with our strategy team. Meanwhile, the team used preliminary findings from the December 7th meeting during its December 14 discussions of the Local Faith Community Self Assessment provided by the District. This document constitutes a report of our self assessment.

In addition to examining these community needs, the strategic planning team will consider St Peter's financial and other resources, reflect on our past accomplishments by discussing a church history now being updated, and challenge all to imagine the best

future for our Church. We anticipate completion of long-range and short-range plans for St. Peter's by July 2010 in time for our fall 2010 stewardship planning for 2011.

Findings from the Self-Assessment

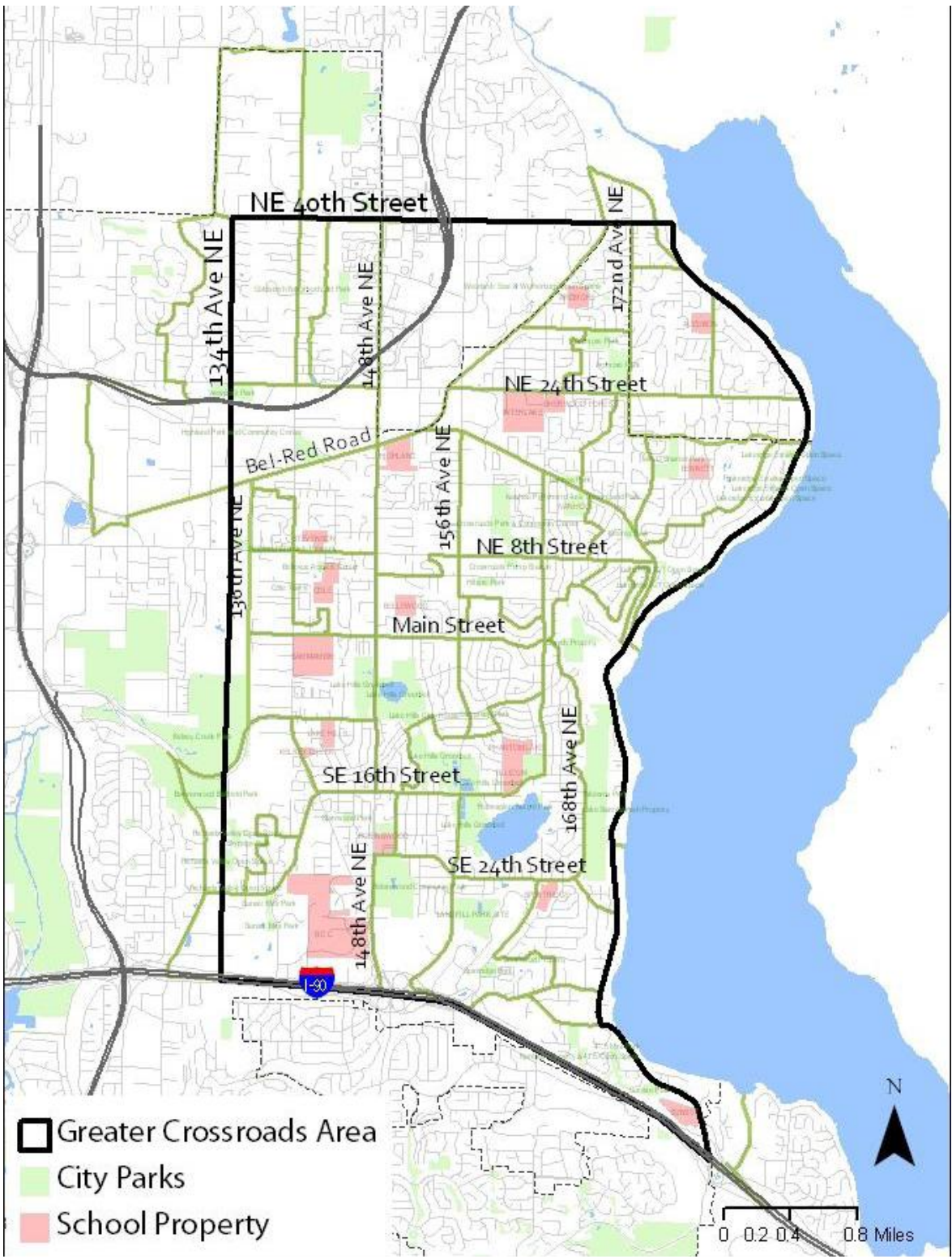
With its memorandum of July 20, 2009, the Seattle District Planning and Strategy Team communicated the requirement for local churches to complete a local community self-assessment tool consisting of a getting ready phase and five major parts.

Getting Ready. During St. Peter's Strategic Planning Team's (SPT) discussions some of us expressed the belief that the various Biblical stories mentioned on the tool identified common characteristics that could be found simultaneously in most churches. When pushed by the pastor to identify the one that was most descriptive of St Peter's at this time, Matthew's description of sensing the need, but being overwhelmed by the task seemed to be the most fitting one.

A. Engaging Your Mission Field. As a preliminary description of our mission field, the Seattle District provided St. Peter's with demographic information on an area within a circle created using a two mile radius. For a variety of reasons we believe that our mission field is broader than that.

As we will note later, our outreach efforts are truly world wide – perhaps more so than might be expected given the size of our congregation. However, we believe that the appropriate mission field is smaller than that. While those who attend our church come from what is generally identified as the greater Seattle Eastside, we are not ready to adopt the approach of our fellow Christians at St. Louise who consider their catchment area to be the “Eastside” and identify a population of around 508,000 as their target.

Considering geography and traffic patterns, we define our primary mission field as the community that is generally bounded on the east by Lake Sammamish, the north by NE 40th, the south by I-90, and the west by 130th Avenue. (See map on next page.) It is in this community that we believe we should most actively be seeking and nurturing disciples. Still we recognize that we are committed to service much beyond these boundaries as we continue our support of missions abroad.



On the four point scale provided, the average response from our SPT for this item was 2.44. In other words, we are somewhere between being disconnected from our mission field and making adjustments to accommodate and/or invite our mission field.

This rating is influenced by the significant changes that are occurring throughout the community. When St. Peter's was formed, none of the surrounding area was within the city limits of Bellevue. All the residents (or most of them) had in common was a postal address and a public school district. There were no major commercial enterprises. Today Microsoft, one of the world's largest and most successful corporations, has its main campus in this area and there are also several other major technology companies nearby. The second largest college in the state is located with the boundaries of the area. There is a busy and growing Islamic Center, two stakes of the Church of Later Day Saints and one of their international Regional Temples, a large Jewish Temple and day school, a Bahá'í center, as well as several new "mega churches," Christian Schools, a Roman Catholic Congregation with over 5,000 on its worship roles, a large shopping mall and a variety of strip malls offering "big box" and local shopping and dining alternatives. Almost all the area is within the City of Bellevue with some of the north end in Redmond and a tip at the southeast corner in the Issaquah School District but outside of incorporated city boundaries.

For now we have to rely on estimates for our understanding of the demographics of the area as results from the 2010 census will not be known for around two years. Between 2000 and 2009 the estimated population of the area has fluctuated between a low of 57,817 and a high of 59,372 with the present population estimated at 59,066 living in 23,884 households. City prepared maps reveal that there are pockets of dense housing, mostly clustered around the Crossroad's shopping mall. Sixty-four percent of the population is between the ages of 20 and 64 with an average age of around 40. The 11% of the population over 65 tend to be clustered in high priced housing near Lake Sammamish or in one of several housing units built specifically for senior citizens. Not surprisingly, ethnic groups tend to cluster in different parts of the area with the Indian group centered near the western edge and much of the Hispanic population nearer the center.

When St. Peter's was founded nearly all people in this area were Caucasians. Now 32% of the people are from other races. There is a rapidly growing Hispanic population and a large Asian population that includes one of the region's densest populations of Eastern Indian peoples. As is evident from public school data on the next page in Table 1, the younger population is more diverse and the free and reduced price lunch counts (F/R) reveal more low income population than is generally associated with Bellevue. Not immediately evident from racial counts are the varied ethnic groups that live within the area. For example, the large numbers of children who speak English as a second language include Russian and other families lumped in the overall "Caucasian" counts.

As was the case when St Peter's was launched in 1963, the population is well educated. Fifty-three percent of the adults have Bachelor's or graduate or professional degrees and seventy eight percent have at least some college education.

While some of the wealthiest people in the world live in Seattle's Eastside communities, sixty-eight percent of households in the Crossroad's area have incomes of less than 100,000 dollars per year. Those with lower incomes tend to cluster in the central part of the community.

**Table 1
BELLEVUE SCHOOL DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR
GREATER CROSSROADS AREA (As of 10/1/2009)**

SCHOOL	ENROLL	F/R %	AFR AM	ASIA N	HISP ANIC	MUL TI	WHIT E	OTHE R FIRST LANG	ESL	SPE C ED
ARDMORE	326	51%	5%	25%	26%	12%	31%	53%	31%	13%
BENNETT	393	7%	1%	24%	2%	11%	61%	25%	9%	6%
LAKE HILLS	523	63%	6%	23%	32%	8%	30%	60%	38%	8%
PHANTOM LAKE	314	40%	2%	24%	13%	10%	51%	30%	16%	11%
SHERWOOD FOREST	399	51%	7%	25%	23%	9%	36%	50%	33%	16%
SPIRITRIDGE	290	23%	2%	16%	5%	12%	64%	21%	11%	10%
STEVENSON	686	36%	6%	50%	20%	6%	18%	61%	33%	4%
ALL BSD ELEM	7450	22.7%	2.8%	27.3%	9.4%	11.8%	48.4%	32.1%	15.4 %	6.7%
HIGHLAND	497	42%	5%	21%	23%	7%	44%	44%	16%	16%
ODLE	683	24%	4%	41%	9%	10%	37%	40%	1%	7%
ROBINSWOOD MS	27	56%	0	7%	19%	19%	56%	26%	0	4%
TILlicUM	695	24%	3%	13%	9%	15%	60%	23%	7%	11%
ALL BSD MIDDLE SCHOOL	3862	20.7%	2.7%	28.6%	7.9%	9.7%	50.8%	29.6%	5.1%	9.4%
INTERLAKE	1341	25%	3%	29%	9%	8%	51%	36%	5%	9%
ROBINSWOOD HS	166	55%	8%	11%	22%	6%	52%	30%	2%	20%
SAMMAMISH	961	32%	5%	20%	14%	7%	52%	36%	11%	15%
ALL BSD HIGH SCHOOLS	5759	18.5%	2.9%	27.9%	6.6%	7.9%	54.3%	28.8%	4.3%	9.6%

**Table 2
Examples other schools in area (excluding those that are primarily early childhood settings (Demographic Data Not Available):**

St Louise Parish School	Jewish Day School	Calvary Lutheran School
Eastside Christian School	Bellevue Children's Academy	Eton School
Neighborhood Christian School		

It is relatively easier to collect demographic data than to pin down the pressing needs of the people within the mission field. Because of programs of our church and work of various social services agencies, we know there are homeless and hungry in our midst. We know that there are youth who have severe problems with drugs, sexual identity and abuse. Domestic violence requires constant attention from law enforcement. People are losing their homes to foreclosures and there are unemployed who are having little luck finding work in this economy. We know that divorced individuals, widows, and widowers are lonely. People from India, Russia, Korea, and many other nations feel isolated and lost in a culture that is vastly different from their homelands. It is amply evident that there are substantial numbers who lack the spiritual support provided by a faith community.

There are also many NGO's and state and city agencies working with the various faith communities in the area to provide support for the people faced with such problems. What we are unsure of at this point is which of these problems we have the capabilities of affecting and which of them are being least effectively addressed by existing services. The city is producing an updated report on the state of human services in the area that is due in early 2010. We hope that from that report and from our continued interactions with other faith communities our SPT will be able to more precisely identify the needs that we can best help meet.

B. Incorporating and Discipling. Of all the topics, this one received the lowest ratings from the SPT. **The average score of 2.25 seemed, from our discussion, to reveal more that we felt we were doing little to seek out and make disciples rather than considering starting a disciple-making system.** That is not to say we are unaware of the need to do so. Outreach through childcare and children related ministries has been one technique that has been pursued in a variety of ways. As church members engage in special activities such as feeding the homeless, or providing support to other missions, outsiders are invited in and urged to become part of our work. There is little deliberate direction to these efforts and a clear need to attend to developing more productive approaches as part of the total renewal anticipated through the work of the SPT with the entire congregation.

C. Supporting Disciples. **In contrast with the preceding item, the team responded positively to this one averaging 3.14 with its ratings.** From the discussion of this item it was evident that members of the team lean more toward the belief that we have disciple support in place than the thought that we are starting such support. A reasonably high percentage, somewhere around 25% of the leaders of the church, are engaged once or more a week in a formal bible study. All have at least bi-monthly study and reflection sessions. A new faith community within the church rotates leadership responsibility for such study among its members ensuring not only that the study occurs but that the participants grow in their ability to help others learn. In short, once people are a part of

the church we provide good support; we just don't do as well getting the new disciples in the first place.

D. Disciples Transforming the World. As noted in discussing issue A, St. Peter's members actively seek to serve as disciples to the world. **The average rating of 2.56 reflects more the concern of SPT members for how well we may be transforming the area we have identified as our mission field, the Crossroads area, than how actively we have sought to serve others.** For a small church we have been quite active reaching out with a team to Kenya, supporting a missionary in Nepal and supporting one of our senior members who gave extraordinary support in that region of the world. We have also faithfully kept up support of apportionments and missions through the connectional church. Several groups in the church are active in feeding and supporting homeless and needy groups in Seattle, perhaps continuing practices that were initiated when there were fewer needs closer to our home base. Still, within our own area we provide regular feeding to the needy in the Crossroad's center, support special worship services for those in retirement/nursing homes, provide support to shut-ins, help Indian community members with worship support, and extend a variety of help to individuals. If anything, we may be doing many more things than the general members of the congregation realize.

One member of the SPT gave pause to the group when he asked how many of the groups providing this wide range of services actually invited new members and changed over time as opposed to continuing with the same people year after year. This is a question that will receive further consideration.

E. Overall Rating and Reflection. **Responding to this final item, the SPT gave an average rating of 2.78, essentially saying we are on the way but still short of the goal of walking alongside our mission field in direct ministry to the community need.** As we said at the outset, we are sensing the need but overwhelmed by the task. At the same time, as we concluded our conversations we had a renewed sense that we were eager to engage in this new work and were definitely not a valley of dry bones waiting for new life.

Our mission statement remains as a challenge as we continue our planning:

To bring people to a personal relationship with God through Christ and to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to minister to the world.

**Near the Crossroads where
North meets South and East meets West**